

كسر القوالب Breaking the mold

#Breaking_The_Mold

Arab Civil Society Actors and their Quest to Influence Policy-Making

Country: Yemen

Civil Society's Role in Passing Policies for Engaging Youth to Work With Official Institutions Case Study

| Studies & Economic Media Center |

Young people represent the most influential group in society as they are productive and active energy. Therefore, many countries are working on activating the role of youth in development. Civil society has contributed to consolidating these convictions by enhancing their community participation, making their voices heard, and enabling them to contribute to their societies' development.

However, some countries, including Yemen, still have a vague situation concerning youth contribution and civil society's role in development. Therefore, the present study aims to identify civil society's role in passing policies to engage youth to work with official institutions and the influential factors and results of that role. Finally, it aims to conclude with lessons learned about enhancing youth opportunities to participate in formal decision-making.

This paper was written according to the methodology of the case study and adopted library data research, targeting five civil society organizations, ten young activists who were involved in projects related to the study objective carried out by these organizations, and 8 government leaders who worked with these youth and those organizations.

FIRST: PROBLEM'S BACKGROUND AND GENERAL CONTEXT

Yemen suffers from political and economic problems rooted since the 1994 war, the six Saada wars between 2003 and 2006, the youth revolution in 2011, and finally, the ongoing war since March 2015, all of which have destroyed the country and affected society and decimated the economy. Amid these conflicts, civil society had played diverse roles. Over the past ten years, it has made important contributions, including providing services, supporting decentralization efforts, encouraging youth participation in working with official institutions, and promoting development in general¹.

There are more than 10 thousand registered civil society organizations in Yemen, of which only 30% are active, and the rest of them have limited and seasonal activities or registered without being active. It is estimated that there are almost 4 thousand unregistered organizations².

Despite a large number of civil society organizations, the presence of thousands of youth initiatives and dozens of civil society networks, the majority of which are led by young people and have effective impacts on society³, it is not yet clear to measure their role in supporting youth participation in working with official institutions. The efforts of dozens of civil society organizations that have worked on similar projects have been monitored. However, access to accurate data on those efforts is still only available through focused research.

¹ World Bank, *Yemen civil society organizations in transition, Study, 2013, p. 7*

² Ministry of Social Affairs, 2017

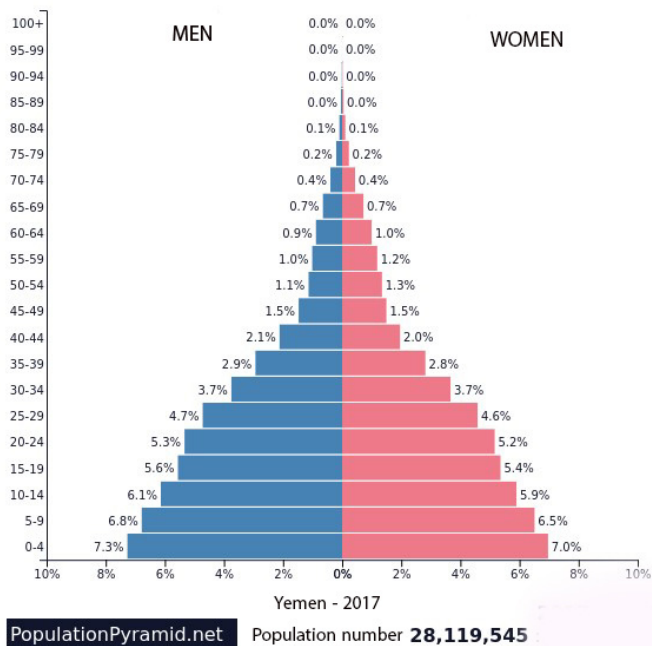
³ According to the reports of international organizations, led by United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), United Nations Development Program and the organizations under discussion, not literal

During the last decade, civil society organizations in Yemen have worked in an unstable situation due to the country's conflicts; nevertheless, they are struggling to achieve real effects, the most prominent of which is enhancing youth participation in official institutions.

The problem lies in the need-to-know civil society's role in passing policies for engaging youth in official institutions, the evolution of this role, the influential factors, and finally, lessons learned.

SECOND: CIVIL SOCIETY EFFORTS TO ENGAGE YOUTH IN WORKING WITH OFFICIAL INSTITUTIONS

According to the criterion of the proximity of the project to the study's objectives, five prominent organizations that have implemented projects to support the engagement of young people to work with official institutions during the last ten years were selected. A sample interview questionnaire was then designed to study these organizations' efforts, as two projects were focused on in each of them. They were compared as the case study is based on one experience for each organization according to the following table:



Young people represent 33.8% of the population in the age group of 18-30 years, and they are the energies of society and the engine of the 2011 revolution⁴.

The signs of the ongoing conflict in Yemen affected the youth from several aspects, most notably the growing poverty, unemployment, deprivation, limited capacity building to deal with the times, the polarization of violent groups, lack of psychological balance, intellectual vacuum and the wrong dealing with heritage. A study showed that Yemeni youth's loyalty and affiliation decreased due to the ongoing war from 55% to 20%, which is negatively reflected in their treatment of public issues⁵.



⁴ According to the results of the respondents' interviews

⁵ Results of a panel discussion on the reality of Yemeni youth in the ongoing war between exploitation and incitement, one program from the homeland, December 2015, 31

Organization	The project and the timing of its implementation	Scope	Partner Official Entities	Business strategy	Most important outputs
Alf Ba Civilian and Coexistence (Adan)	Jurists for Peace (2017)	Local 3 governorates	Planning offices Security offices	Training and rehabilitating Coordinating the role of youth by forming protection committees Awareness campaigns	Forming protection committees that work continuously with security institutions to promote, raise awareness of, and defend human rights and peace laws and principles.
Resonate Yemen (Sanaa)	Engaging civil society in peacebuilding and promoting the role of youth to work at the local level (2018)	Local	Governorates: Sana'a Aden Marib Hadramout	Training youth to work with local authority leaders Coordinating youth work as advisors to decision-makers in the governorates (agents/directors of directorates). Following up and directing youth work with local leaders.	Community priorities for the governorate Preparing a policy paper on a priority issue in each governorate Submit project proposals to the decision-maker on a priority issue in the governorate Advocacy campaign for the targeted cause
Studies and Economic Media Center (Taizz)	Voices of youth and women (2014-2013)	Local/National	The Ministry of Local Administration and five governorates	Joint training for local authority members, youth and women, to work together and agree on their needs Dialogue sessions with involved government personnel. Implementing a training program for around 125 local media professionals on decentralization and media coverage of youth and women's priorities.	Providing 5 centers to support youth and women to reach their priorities Enhancing the capacity of 250 local councilors in the field of planning and monitoring and working with youth committees composed of 1,200 youth Preparing a guide for integrating the needs of youth and women into local policies Writing dozens of press stories on local issues Preparing youth for four policy papers on important local and national issues
Social and Democratic Forum (Sanaa)	Raising awareness about anti-corruption among youth (2013 - 2012)	National	Monitoring agencies	Training of 40 youths, for three months, in the field of combating corruption, which included practical training with concerned monitoring agencies. A field study as a graduation project for the participants on evaluating the performance of monitoring agencies and discussed with the involved parties and published in a book.	Building the capacities of young people as experts in fighting corruption Employing many young people in monitoring agencies and civil society organizations Creating a knowledge reference on evaluating the performance of monitoring agencies and making use of them during the National Dialogue Conference Enhancing acceptance of involved parties in the monitoring agencies to work with youth
Youth Without Borders (Adan)	Young Peace Pioneers (-2015 2017)	Local	Local authority (5 governorates)	Supporting projects for youth initiatives that work with the local authority to promote social peace.	Developing 30 youth initiatives to contribute to promoting societal peace Jointly adopting and handling 14 community issues

According to the above table and the participants' opinions, it became clear that the period between 2011 and 2018 witnessed great activity for civil society organizations, especially concerning their efforts to support young people's involvement to work with official institutions. Whether in the above table or its other projects, most of its projects focused more on working with local authority institutions than with central institutions, and the issue of peace being the most important issue under the current circumstances.

According to the research participants' views, the business strategies adopted by these organizations focused on training, advocacy, coordination, awareness-raising, and dialogues with stakeholders.

The majority of the outcomes achieved were directed towards forming youth action committees, adopting addressing priority issues presented by youth, and providing a set of publications that included studies, policy papers, guides, awareness materials, evaluation reports, and press stories that were discussed and accepted with involved government personnel.

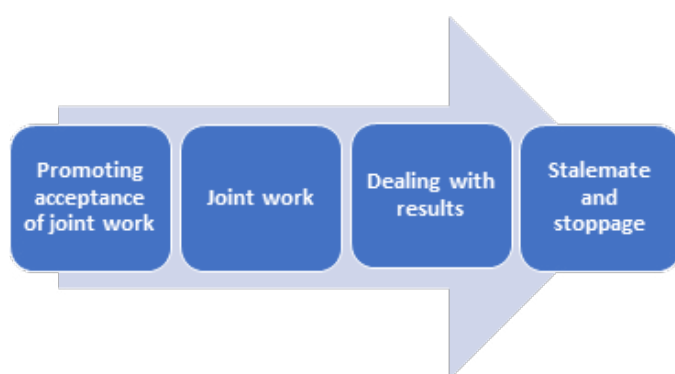
In general, the research participants believe that many organizations have succeeded in pushing the participation of young people to work with official institutions, and among those efforts are programs to qualify young people to engage in the national dialogue and their role in preparing the draft constitution, the law on the right to information, and other outputs that youth participated in.

PHASES OF DEVELOPMENT OF CIVIL SOCIETY'S ROLE

The organizations and youth participating in this research unanimously agreed that the development of civil society's role passed through four phases:

- Promoting acceptance of joint work: Government officials were urged to accept the idea of youth participation and focused on conducting dialogues to persuade them to engage in the project, and required demonstrating the mutual benefits of both parties, and often resulted in their acceptance of the idea.

Phases of development of civil society's role in engaging youth to work with official institutions



- Joint work: It was characterized by the high response to engagement in work activities by officials, especially with the presence of benefits such as training, awareness, preparation of studies, policy papers and evaluations, all of which strengthened their interaction, yet this stage was a kind of caution in dealing with officials with some activities that they expected would result in commitments out of their power.

- Dealing with results: It was characterized by fluctuation between accepting some results and rejecting some under the pretext that there is no authority to issue policies, either because they need authorities with responsibilities and at higher levels or need efforts outside the capacity of officials.

- Stalemate and stoppage: Once the project ends, the parties' efforts - organizations, youth and officials - for joint work begin to slacken and then stop. However, some limited efforts remained fruitful for periods after the end of the project due to a self-centered role for young people.

THE IMPACT OF THE ROLE ON YOUTH PARTICIPATION

Success Story:

Samaha Al-Hayal was supported by the Resonate Yemen Organization within the framework of the Youth Engagement Project, where she worked with Dr. Muin Abdul Malik, former Minister of Public Works and later the Prime Minister. Within one month only, she submitted a policy paper and project proposals to the government to adopt societal issues that were approved, which raised the level of confidence and acceptance to deal with them.

According to the opinions of the participants in the research and the results of the follow-up of the activities of the target organizations, the efforts of civil society to engage youth to work with decision-makers were reflected in many real outputs, including a set of decisions and participations related to addressing issues contributed by youth, including, for example, the issue of Hodeidah sewers, and the situation of youth in Aden governorate, the refugee problem in Mukalla, and security in the governorate of Aden, Sharaab Al Rawnah Taiz Road, and joint work committees in Hadramout governorate, in addition to the adoption of 14 local community peace issues, all of which supported the acceptance of those involved parties and their confidence in the participation of young people in more than one project presented by civil society organizations.

However, the effects of these outputs varied between good in local development issues and limited in peacebuilding due to the lack of response from the security authorities and their stance towards the idea of building peace. The majority of the research participants expressed their lack of conviction about the level of these effects, especially as they needed enough time, which was not available and led to a decrease in the level of interaction by officials.

THE MOST PROMINENT FACTORS AFFECTING CIVIL SOCIETY'S ROLE

The participants in the research reported that the most prominent positive factors that affected the desire of decision-makers to benefit from training and awareness opportunities, studies and the outputs of the activities were the enthusiasm of young people and their eagerness to interact with the implemented efforts, as well as the timing of implementing efforts that were appropriate for joint work, and joint activities to build the capacities of youth and officials.

As for the most prominent negative factors, they were concentrated in the low level of awareness among government officials, the unstable general climate, which was reflected in the excessive caution of officials and youth together, security tensions and harassment against young people from some armed groups and impeded work, as well as insufficient time to build confidence, and finally the cessation of activities due finishing the project and the failing in measuring the impact of the project, and consequently the subsequent work efforts are halted.

IMPACTFUL TRANSFORMATIONS IN SUPPORT OF YOUTH PARTICIPATION

According to the participants' views in the research, the most prominent of these shifts centered on the growing awareness of government officials, especially locally, towards youth issues. They became convinced that youth should be involved when adopting some local public policies, for example, the experience of Resonate Yemen, Alf Ba, Youth Without Borders. The youth support centers established by the Economic Media Center in five governorates were able to mobilize many local public affairs issues, and there has been an official response to their efforts, all of which are transformations made by the trust in working with youth and formed as a result of real efforts made by those organizations with official institutions.

THIRD: RESULTS

1. The majority of civil society efforts to involve youth in working with official institutions focused on local authority institutions, as the political situation limited the central institutions' response.
2. The business strategies adopted by these organizations, the interaction of youth and the successes achieved during the implementation of projects contributed to creating confidence in youth and civil society in government agencies. Thus, some experiments succeeded, some of which are still ongoing.
3. The ongoing conflict, insufficient time to build confidence, the poor level of awareness of officials and their concerns about the repercussions of the status quo, and the harassment of armed groups have limited organizations' role in achieving some of their goals.
4. The repercussions of the conflict based on the security aspect, and the cessation of many local authority units and government institutions from performing their tasks, have led to the limitation of benefiting from the results of the efforts that have been achieved and building upon them in playing a wider role in this aspect.

FOURTH: LESSONS LEARNED

1. Joint training, constructive dialogue, and working through effective youth committees are all appropriate strategies to achieve better results in official authorities' response.
2. Creating motivation and establishing trust are pivotal factors for continuing civil society efforts in supporting youth involvement to work with official authorities and the continuity of the official response to them.
3. Ensuring the realization of continuous benefits for all parties is linked to providing the ingredients for continuity after the end of the project. The results are not limited to the project implementation phase.
4. Working with the local levels showed better successes than the main levels, which means that the chances for continuation are still available.



BREAKING THE MOLD PROJECT

In mid-2018, the "Civil Society Actors and Policymaking in the Arab World" program at IFI, with the support of Open Society Foundations, launched the second round of its extended research project "Arab Civil Society Actors and their Quest to Influence Policy-Making". This project mapped and analyzed the attempts of Arab civil society, in all its orientations, structures, and differences, to influence public policy across a variety of domains. This research produced 92 case studies outlining the role of civil society in impacting political, social, economic, gender, educational, health-related, and environmental policies in ten Arab countries: Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, Jordan, Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia, Yemen, and the Arab Gulf.

Over two dozen researchers and research groups from the above countries participated in this project, which was conducted over a year and a half. The results were reviewed by an advisory committee for methodology to ensure alignment with the project's goals, and were presented by the researchers in various themed sessions over the course of the two days.

THE CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS AND POLICY-MAKING PROGRAM

at the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs at AUB, examines the role that civil society actors play in shaping and making policy. Specifically, the program focuses on the following aspects: how civil society actors organize themselves into advocacy coalitions; how policy networks are formed to influence policy processes and outcomes; and how policy research institutes contribute their research into policy. The program also explores the media's expanding role, which some claim has catalyzed the Uprisings throughout the region.


THE ISSAM FARES INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC POLICY AND INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS AT THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

The Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs at the American University of Beirut (AUB Policy Institute) is an independent, research-based, policy-oriented institute. Inaugurated in 2006, the Institute aims to harness, develop, and initiate policy relevant research in the Arab region. We are committed to expanding and deepening policy-relevant knowledge production in and about the Arab region; and to creating a space for the interdisciplinary exchange of ideas among researchers, civil society and policy-makers.


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